



Rufus Reid with Sullivan Fortner - Always in the Moment

Musicians:

Rufus Reid - Bass

Sullivan Fortner - Piano

On the title track of this record, I can hear each note *lean* towards the next, glowing with anticipation. "Always in the Moment," as a concept, is an impossibility. Just being "in the moment" some of the time is a challenge that most of us struggle with daily.

Rufus Reid never stops. Rufus was born in 1944 in Atlanta, Georgia, and raised in Sacramento, California. His first instrument was the trumpet, which he started playing in middle school. By the time he graduated from high school, Rufus knew the draft was coming for him, so, as high school was finishing up, he found an audition for the Air Force band and got to work. His mom wasn't happy about his not going directly to college, but she knew it was better to carry a trumpet than a rifle.

The band was a concert and marching band, built for playing martial themes for dignitaries and Taps at funerals. First stationed at Maxwell Air Force Base, in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1962, Rufus was the only African-American in the band. The Air Force felt like they couldn't march in segregated Alabama with a mixed-race band, but they weren't going to tell Rufus to stay behind--so they didn't march at all. They'd get together in the mornings to practice some music and then they'd have the rest of the day off. If Rufus left the base he learned to stay on the "black side" of town. It was here that Rufus heard iconic live concerts of James Brown, Ike and Tina Turner and Bobby Blue Bland. Rufus remembers one day visiting a club in Birmingham with some friends. The crowd was dancing to "Senõr Blues" by Horace Silver. "*I thought, 'what is this? Who wrote that bass line?' That was the start for me.*" Back in Montgomery, Rufus finagled a key to the Air Force instrument room. He'd spend whole afternoons and evenings alone in that room in Montgomery, sequestered on a military base--a trumpet player in a marching band that didn't march--teaching himself the upright bass.

In 1964 Rufus got stationed in Japan. Here, the scene was much more integrated. Rufus loved being in Japan and loved the people, food and the culture, and they *revered* jazz. In Japan Rufus would march with the band and travel the country, but his home base was in

Tachikawa, North of Tokyo. He had a lot of free time, especially at night. Tokyo was one of the premier destinations for American touring acts, Rufus would see concerts multiple times a week and he'd hit the local jam sessions in between. He saw Duke Ellington, The Modern Jazz Quartet, Charlie Persip, Horace Parlan, Philly Joe Jones... He'd been teaching himself the bass for about three years when he first saw the Oscar Peterson Trio with the immortal Ray Brown on bass. *"Now that's what I want to do."* Upon leaving the military in 1966, Rufus sold his trumpet, bought a bass and got back to work.

Arriving as a classical bass major at Northwestern University near Chicago in 1967, Rufus had the bass in his hands "17 hours a day." They couldn't teach him to play Jazz but they could teach him how to develop a good *sound*. This is where Rufus learned how to really study the instrument. His focus on tone is where his journey as one of the greats of the instrument really began.

Rufus stayed in Chicago after graduating, where he landed the house bassist gig at the Jazz Showcase: *"The Jazz Showcase was a Godsend to me. Each week a new musician come to town and play with the band. Kenny Burrell, Milt Jackson, James Moody, Kenny Dorham, Sonny Stitt, Hank Mobley, Philly Joe Jones, Roy Hanes, Harold Land, Bobby Hutcherson, and the great Eddie Harris, who taught me so much... Every week was like going to school."*

Almost 50 years later, long since having moved outside of New York City, Rufus first heard Sullivan Fortner. There was chatter about a new young pianist on the scene, so when Sullivan played his inaugural stint at the Village Vanguard in 2019, Rufus came to listen and he stayed for both sets, smiling and enjoying the trio truly enjoying each other.

"It's been a LONG TIME since I've had so much fun at a concert. I don't often react so strongly to the younger musicians I hear. Sullivan has a lot of facility but you don't even necessarily notice how skilled he is. In this music, we've lost a lot of our elders. We talk about Tommy Flanagan, Hank Jones, Barry Harris and soon we will speak about Sullivan that way too. Sullivan has the sort of mentality and musical savvy that I recognize in the greats."

"When I started out, I was always the baby in the band. Now, I haven't been the baby of the band in a long time and I'm almost 45 years older than Sullivan, but I love that we made this record together. I'm glad that we can show that age doesn't matter and that ultimately it's about the music. The astounding part for me was it was just one or two takes for each piece. You can rehearse forever and get it squeaky clean, but this is something different. A moment recorded, and for me it was special."

Improvisational music demands this tethering to the now, and that pursuit becomes a framework for your life. The discipline, the places, the stories, the love, the teachers, the cultures you embrace and the cultures that embrace you--you breathe all of that in and then you let it all go--and find the moment.

- Elan Mehler